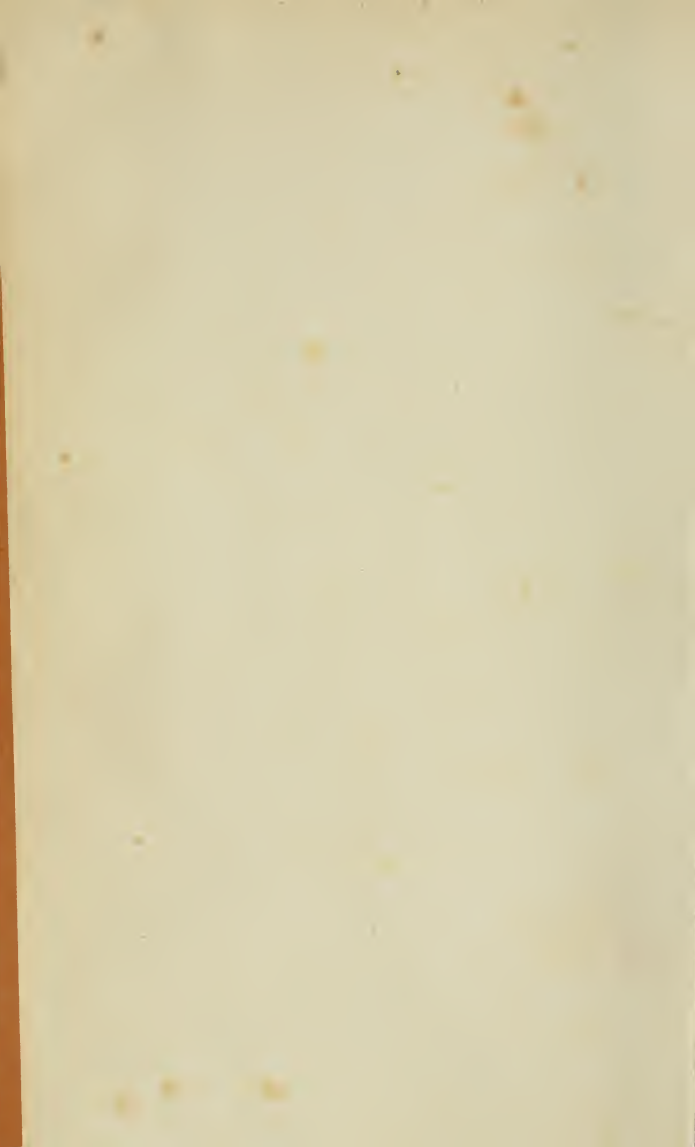


LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS





Blumfield
HOW IS THE GOSPEL TO BE PREACHED
TO THE POOR?

AN ANSWER TO QUESTIONS AS TO THE
FUTURE WORK OF THE

BISHOP OF LONDON'S FUND,

IN A LETTER TO THE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

BY THE

REV. F. G. BLOMFIELD, M.A.

NOVEMBER 1872.

Not Published.

7, *Lancaster Gate*, Nov. 19th, 1872.

MY DEAR LORD,

In a letter which you have lately sent to the Clergy, and to others who are interested in the Church's work in London, you have been good enough to invite an expression of our opinion as to any improvements which may be made in the work of the great missionary association for the diocese, the Bishop of London's Fund. That association is drawing towards the close of its first ten years, and we are called upon to review its past and to provide for its future. "What," so you ask us, "are the objects which in future should be kept most prominently in view? and what are the means and the machinery by which those objects may be attained most effectually? I fully appreciate the importance of these inquiries, and as my health will not allow me to take any part in the deliberations of the Committee appointed to consider and report upon

the future of the Fund, I hope I shall not be deemed presumptuous if I venture to trouble both your Lordship and the Committee with the following remarks. I speak with the utmost deference for the opinions of those who have been far more active than I have been in our diocesan associations, and still more of those among my brethren, who, having laboured in populous districts, can bring theories to the test of experience. I can only plead a long connection with the general work of this diocese as a ground for contributing anything to the councils which are to assist you in this weighty matter.

The four questions which have been submitted to us resolve themselves into this inquiry, "What is the organization by which the influences of religion can best be brought to bear on those dense masses of the population which are now wholly untouched by them? It is the question, always old and always new, which must perplex the Church of Christ for many generations to come. But it is here narrowed to the inquiry, "Have the methods hitherto employed by the Bishop of London's Fund been the best fitted to attain this end—the evangelization of the multitude? Now the principle on which we have hitherto acted has been this, that the ultimate object to be aimed at and to be attained as early as possible, is the erection of new churches, and the subdivision of parishes into independent districts. No one can deny that up to a certain point the principle was a just one. A

parish with 20,000 or 15,000 souls and only one church can never under any circumstances be a satisfactory state of things; and, in the earlier years of the Bishop of London's Fund, and before it, it was absolutely necessary to remedy the evil by the erection of new churches and new parishes. But I cannot help thinking, and many whose judgments deserve to be considered concur with me in the opinion, that in our zeal we have begun to carry this principle too far, and have multiplied churches and districts beyond present requirements.

We have been confirmed in this error by the fact that it is only by the consecration of a new church that a permanent endowment can be obtained out of the funds at the disposal of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. It does not seem to occur to us that an effort should be made to obtain new powers for the Commissioners, before we go on multiplying the old parochial machinery, which, however admirable and necessary, is by itself unequal to the strain put upon it, and which may be weakened instead of strengthened by this process of dismemberment.

I most thankfully acknowledge that, whatever mistakes we have made in this direction, still, under God's blessing, a vast amount of good has been effected. No one who knows what one of our great parishes was before new churches were built in it, and what it is now, will doubt the improvement that has taken place. At the same time we ought to

bear in mind the evils that may result from carrying this subdivision beyond reasonable limits. First of all there is the difficulty of finding a sufficient number of men capable of being able and efficient heads of so many independent districts. I suppose that in no city or town in England are there more zealous and devoted clergymen than are to be found in many a destitute district in London; but a man may have the piety and zeal of St. Paul without possessing that apostle's powers of directing and ruling the churches; and it is no disparagement of the excellent men who labour amongst our poor to say, that some of them would work more efficiently under the guidance of abler and more experienced men. No one knows better than your Lordship that in multiplying incumbencies we have created a want which cannot be adequately supplied. In the second place, this multitude of small independent cures impairs the unity of the Church's work. There is no system, no concentration of energy, no union of forces in any of those ancient parishes which are now broken up. Every man is doing his work single-handed, instead of many labouring together. And it must be so, so long as we make an independent incumbency the indispensable accompaniment of every new church. In the third place, we have too much overlooked the fact, that the great mass of the working people do not and will not attend divine service in our churches. I thankfully admit an improvement

in this respect, and that we can point to many which are at least tolerably well filled. But, after all, these are exceptional instances, and are due to exceptional men. Given the average clergyman and the average service, and it will be true for a very long time to come that the mass of the working people will remain outside our churches. Many a long year is needed to educate the million up to the level of the Prayer book ; it will not be in our day, if indeed it will ever be ; and in our zeal to multiply churches we are raising the topstone of the edifice without having dug the foundations. A consecrated building with its stated services is not the building into which you can for the present gather the multitude, and it is the multitude whose salvation we are seeking. It must never be forgotten by us that the Bishop of London's Fund was not instituted for the purpose of perfecting our parochial system, but for the purpose of saving souls that are perishing around us now and to-day. It is a society for the evangelization of the multitude, not for the general promotion of church work ; and while it is to leave the upper and middle classes to take care of themselves, it is to go to the rescue of those who cannot help themselves, and to preach the gospel to the poor. Those methods which will effect this truly Christ-like end are the only ones with which this association has to concern itself ; and we are assuredly committing a grave error if, on the one hand, we

are employing too much of our resources in multiplying a machinery imperfectly adapted to the evils to be remedied, and, on the other hand, neglecting those methods which in the present condition of the working people can best draw them under the influence of the gospel.

Here, then, is the most serious of all the mistakes into which we are insensibly falling, that in the work of evangelization we have treated what is termed by us Mission work as a temporary expedient instead of regarding it as a permanent system. It is only here that we have methods as elastic and variable as the many wants which have to be satisfied; only here that the hands of clergy and laity are not tied by a narrow and straitened uniformity. Something far more elastic and far more vigorous than that uniformity is needed, and it is only here that we shall find it, outside the consecrated church and outside of the old parochial system. Not that this system is to be destroyed; it is the stronghold of the national Church; but it must be supplemented if that Church is to be true to its calling, and is to save the people.

This, then, is one great principle which we have to lay down for our guidance in the future. The kind of work which we have termed mission work is to be at least as permanent and as prominent an object of the Association as the erection of churches and the creation of new parishes. My own conviction is, that if we wish to make any real impression on the mul-

titude, to influence working men, and to go down to lower depths and rescue the waifs and outcasts of London, we must spend as little strength as possible in building more churches, and throw our chief energies into those rougher and readier methods which will go straight to men's homes and hearts. But I do not mean by mission work those isolated efforts which have been made under the Bishop of London's Fund—I mean a far more concentrated and vigorous effort than any that has been as yet attempted.

What is a Mission? It is a question which has been often asked in reference to our work, and the answer has been, "A mission is one clergyman, or two at the most, sent into a conventional district of some 6,000 souls, to open services, get together schools, hold meetings, and form the nucleus of a congregation which is afterwards to migrate into a church." Now if these missions are regarded as tentative, as helping us to feel our way to what a mission really should be, I am far from finding fault with them, and heartily thank God for the measure of success He has granted them. No man can go anywhere with the love of souls in his heart and seek to do his Master's work, and not leave his mark. Still it has seemed to me, as to a good many others, long before the Bishop of London's Fund was created, that such isolated missions are not the true mode of influencing the multitude. One main reason is the fact that they are isolated. Precisely the same objections apply to this

multiplication of independent missions as to the multiplication of independent districts. Few men can carry on such a work single-handed without guidance, without succour, and above all without sympathy. When the heart of an East End missionary, one might say of an East End clergyman, faints within him, and how often he alone knows, he may turn indeed to the Divine Fountain of strength and consolation ; but to whom amongst his fellows can he look for counsel and cheer ? Wonderful it is to think that in their loneliness so few of them grow wearied in well-doing, or sink down in despair. But all this isolation with its weakness and suffering need not be and ought not to be. It does more than anything else to cripple the Church's work and to impair the unity of that work ; it breaks up into a number of isolated and feeble efforts what ought to be concentrated into a few powerful and far-reaching organizations. It fails in guiding wisdom, in motive power, and in united effort. The first question therefore, we have to ask ourselves is, how can we introduce into our evangelizing work a corporate life and an organic movement ? The answer surely is, by grouping that work around a few centres, and by so constituting this central force that every member of it shall depend on another, the personal influence of the head be felt by each member, and the work done by them singly and altogether be done systematically, and permeate to every corner of the mission-field.

We do not want examples, either in the ancient history of the Church, or among ourselves to-day, of the manner in which such an evangelizing force is to be constituted. To say nothing of the experiments which one party in our own Church have made in this direction, we have only to look at the Roman Catholic body to see how it is in this way that they are drawing over London a network for catching the souls of men. The true idea of a mission is a number of men, clerical and lay, living together in community under one head, devoting themselves to one object, the evangelizing of the multitude ; seeking this great object by every means and agency which can gain a hearing for the gospel ; sustaining their own energies by spiritual exercises and brotherly intercourse ; not working in opposition to or outside of the parochial system, but co-operating with the secular clergy, at once stimulating them to exertion and strengthening them in their labours by subsidizing their limited means of action, and doing work which as a rule a settled pastor is the least able to perform. By the side of the priest and the Levite we need a school of the prophets, and until we have them we shall see no revival of religion on a large scale.

I fully appreciate the dangers which would attend the founding amongst us of such institutions. First of all there is the danger of extravagance. There is the fear of importing into these religious communities practices and habits foreign to our Reformed

Church, and odious to the working people. It is melancholy to think how by this mediævalism one of the most devoted of these institutions, which has toiled in one of our poorest districts with a self-sacrifice truly admirable, has crippled its usefulness and marred its influence, and has failed to gain the entire confidence of the people for whom its members have given up all things. But there is no necessity for vows of obedience, poverty, and celibacy; for excessive asceticism, for mediæval garb, or for services planned upon the Roman model. I see no reason why a college of missionaries should not be founded free from these defects, although the spiritual necessities of men thus banded together must involve practices which will seem strange to Christians on a lower level. In all these undertakings everything depends on the head. Find a leader who can be trusted, and everything may be safely left in his hands.

Another danger is that such religious communities have a tendency to reject episcopal control. This is not the place to enter on the causes of this, or how it might be corrected, the above remark about the choice of a leader is a practical answer. But I am persuaded that, in any communities we might now found, the frequent visit and hearty sympathy of the bishop would always secure that subordination which the welfare of a diocese requires.

Another objection is that such a body standing

outside of the parochial system will clash with it, and interfere with the rights of incumbents. I can only say that if I had the charge of a poor and populous district I should be deeply thankful to have my rights thus interfered with. The people have their rights as well as the clergy, and if the parish priest cannot battle with all the heathenism around him then in Christ's name let the preaching friars come in. I admit the difficulties which would arise from divergent opinions and sectional differences, but the advantages would far outweigh the difficulties; and in a great crisis something must be risked if much is to be achieved.

When I come to speak of the advantages resulting from such a mission I find them so many that I fear I shall tire your Lordship in enumerating them. Of one I have already spoken, that instead of having many ineffectives you will have one able and vigorous head. This one gain alone is of incalculable importance. In all work that is to influence others it is the man that is felt rather than the system. Put a devoted, wise, and able man at the head of the college of evangelists, and the force of his character will be felt through all its members to every human being that comes under their influence. Such a man gives unity, method, force. Missionary efforts are no longer vacillating and conflicting; they become one living power nourished and guided as parts of an organic whole. Each

Christian man or woman who is labouring in this service feels the leader's eye, is stirred to watchfulness, and is guided in perplexity. A devoted leader will call forth devoted men and women out of all ranks, and in the college, with its buildings and services, you give them a centre to which they can resort. For workers from the West End, and how much we need them in the East! such a *pied-a-terre* is an almost indispensable requisite to sustained exertion. It is obvious, also, how much the erection of a few such missionary centres facilitates episcopal superintendence, and gives opportunities for that personal sympathy which is the true secret of power. It is impossible for the diocesan to visit twelve or twenty separate missions, but it is not difficult for him to visit one.

I come next to the benefits which such a community bestows upon the workers. These are in truth incalculable. And, first of all, there is no sense of isolation. "Two are better than one, for if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow." The mutual society help and comfort which they will have one of another is such as words cannot express. There are the daily spiritual exercises and the frequent celebration of the Holy Communion, means without which the soul of the worker is starved, and his spiritual fervour declines. There is the daily interchange of experiences, of failures and successes; the mutual encouragements, the stronger aiding the weaker;

the intercourse of recreation as well as the intercourse of work ; the visits of sympathizers from without, something to remind them that all is not as dreary and savage as the scenes of their labours ; this and more that strengthens and sweetens toil is the fruit of living and working in community. Contrast this with the solitary toiler in his East End lodgings, and ask which of the two systems is the most likely to produce sustained and effective work of the highest kind.

One more argument I must add in favour of this experiment ; that banding men together under a common roof economizes means. I do not say that such a mission, to be perfect in all its details, would not cost a great deal of money, which it would have little difficulty in getting ; but a collegiate life and maintenance is cheaper than any other, and the managers of the Fund need not be deterred by the fear of cost, nor need we be alarmed at the prospect of entering on a work beyond our powers. When once we have accepted the general principle that such an experiment is to be made, it will be for the managers of the fund to provide the money, but the arrangements of the mission and the rules of the community are for your Lordship, and for those whom you may select for leaders.

Now what I would venture to ask, and I know I have many with me, is that at least one such experiment should be attempted, the experiment of a

religious community, banded together for evangelizing work, and free from the errors and extravagancies which have marred and maimed more than one such experiment. If it fails do not repeat it, but at least give it a trial. See whether this cœnobitic and common work, based on the highest principles of self-devotion, will not call forth more unflagging zeal and sustained effort than can be evoked by single and separated workers. See whether it would not gather under its banner a larger number of volunteers drawn from different places and classes, and moving as one army in the warfare against heathenism, and whether it would not call forth more sympathy for its pecuniary support. If it does not do so,—if by this common movement nothing is gained in the cause of souls, and something is lost in the cause of sobriety and order, then we must return, I suppose, to our old methods. All we can then do is to pray the Giver of all good to put new life into those methods, and for those who use them to remember the proverb, “If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength.”

I come next to the agents to be employed in this evangelizing work. The Church has of late somewhat opened its ranks, and done something towards enlisting laymen in the army of workers. But it has long seemed to me, as it has seemed to many others, that we are far too scrupulous and exclusive. Among

the Christian laity of London, and especially among the working people themselves, there is an unsuspected amount of religious enthusiasm; a latent heat which might be kindled into an open flame. At the time the Bishop of London's Fund was first instituted, there was a considerable number of young men in London banded together to preach the gospel, and ready to do it under any non-Roman community that might call them to the work. It is true they were not all very wise, and certainly they were anything but good churchmen, but they were really in earnest, and if the Church had heartily called them they would have answered to the call. The same is true of many a working man zealous for souls, though his zeal may not be balanced either by his knowledge or by his judgment. Now it is the probable error and injudiciousness which might accompany a good deal of lay preaching which has deterred us from more freely using it. But surely it is better to feed people on anything than let them starve. And if these men can speak of God, of sin, and of a Saviour, if from experience they can witness to the power of grace, then they are able to call their fellows out of darkness, and to bring them to Christ. I suppose Samuel, when he founded the schools of the prophets, must have enlisted a good many rough hands and ill-instructed heads; and probably as long as these schools lasted there must have been a vast amount of extravagant and strange

preaching. Still, every way the word of God was preached, and so it must be now if we are to win the multitude. Not educated men only, but, much more, working men should be encouraged to go with the Bible in their hands, and gather little knots of hearers and listeners wherever they can be brought together. The experiment has been already tried, and has been attended with success. Men must "teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord," before we can see God's law written in the hearts of the people of London. It is not so much a multitude of fresh clergy that we need, and we should not get them however much we needed them; what we need is to rouse the Christian laity to a sense of their duties, and make them understand that to whomsoever amongst them God has given the necessary gifts, or an inward call to gospel work, he is an Evangelist, and has a part to take in preaching the Word. No jealousy of clerical privilege or of sacerdotal office ought to make us forget this wider priesthood of the people. So long as the administration of the sacraments and the offices in consecrated buildings are confined to ordained ministers, so long we shall mark the boundary between clergy and laity. Outside of these limits there is a vast field for prayer and preaching, in which Eldad and Medad may do as good service as Aaron. For one priest we need seventy prophets; and it is the profound conviction of

many who know the needs of this time, that unless there arise a multitude of such preachers, there is no hope of "turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just." There is a sense in which it is true that the working men are to be saved by working men ; it was so when the gospel was first preached, and if that gospel is to sink into the roots of our national life it must be so preached again. It may be prejudice on their part, or there may be some reasons why the working class seem so unwilling to receive the gospel at the hands of the clergy ; but where it is preached by men who live in the same court, and toil in the same workshop, such preaching is freed from all suspicion of being a professional matter, its sincerity and simplicity are acknowledged, and ears and hearts are opened to receive it. My Lord, it is as true now as in the days of old, that "God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, and the weak things of this world to confound the things which are mighty ;" and no one who knows the really Christian poor, and the power of their godliness, will doubt what would be the result if they could be called to bear open witness to the truth.

I shall not presume to say what are the best means of calling these humble but effective workers to the duties of an evangelist. Probably in many a parish, as well as in such a missionary institution as

I have described, means would be found of calling forth all who showed zeal and aptitude. Guilds or brotherhoods of workmen might be formed, and sisterhoods among poor women who would thus be knit together in a common work. And when I speak of evangelists I do not mean that these men are to give up their ordinary occupations, still less receive any kind of ordination, but simply that zealous working men may be called to give their aid in such few times of leisure as they have at command, and especially on the Lord's day.

But if these busy toilers may find time to labour in the vineyard, how much more is this the case with Christian men and women who have no field of work for their suppressed energies, yet whose heart is hot within them ! There must be many such in those vast suburbs of Western London which comprise a multitude of persons living wholly at ease in Zion. They cannot all be indifferent to the welfare of the poor, or be ignorant how much the working people need to be leavened with the gospel, if society itself is to continue in peace. I am persuaded they only need the call and the opportunity. To bring the education of the West to bear upon the East, and to create some sympathy between the rich and the poor—this is the one great want of London at the present time. I cannot but think that the Bishop of London's Fund might contribute something towards this much wished for end. Should we not incorporate the " Lay

Helpers Association ?" throw into its management our ablest men ? and let its objects be more widely known in those districts from which help is to come ? But if volunteers in the Christian army are to be enlisted on any large scale the trumpet must first be sounded by those in authority ; and such a stirring call must be rung forth as will startle the slumberers and wake them to duty. Enthusiasm begets enthusiasm ; and if only the impression is once made that there is a great work to be done by those who are now idlers, and an opportunity given them for doing it, we may hope to see many more than have yet come forward ready to do the Lord's work.

The two last questions which we are called upon to answer have reference to the raising of funds. I am afraid that none of us will be able to devise any methods for largely increasing contributions, which, however liberal in themselves, yet in their total amount are a painful evidence of the apathy with which the great majority of our fellow citizens regard all spiritual work. But, of such funds as will be given, less will be spent in the future on sites and churches, and more will be set free for other objects. Something more also might be done to extend the affiliation of destitute to wealthy parishes, which as yet has been very imperfectly acted upon. This affiliation localizes and thereby strengthens sympathy. Who that has read his own heart in this matter cannot bear witness that the very vastness

and indefiniteness of the work to be done has perplexed and obscured his thoughts upon spiritual destitution, and tended to scatter and weaken his interest rather than to deepen it? Concentrate these thoughts on one parish, or one street, or one court, and the mind can measure the need, and realize the object. So that I would endeavour (for the sake, not only of the destitute, but even more of us here at the West End, who by our indifference are perilling our own souls), to assign to each parish in which we live some one definite work in some one locality, chosen out from the vast spaces of want and heathenism. The poor outcast, whom I have visited and comforted and aided, brings home to me London's misery and stirs me to effort in a way which no sermons, or speeches, or reports, or appeals would ever be able to do. It is only by this localized interest and personal contact that larger funds will flow into the Lord's treasury. But we must expect the supply always to fall far short of the need. All I am afraid that we can do is, to pray the Lord of the harvest, Who can make one grain bear a hundred-fold, to bless the scanty means and feeble instruments which alone we can employ for the greatest, most difficult, and most urgent of all works

In conclusion, let me say what we may do, and must do, if our fellow-citizens are to be saved; we must boldly and gladly use all the methods and instruments which the piety and zeal of Christian

workers has anywhere devised to meet the present need. The England and the London of to-day cannot be conquered only by the old weapons of the militant Church. Anything like timidity in employing the new will be fatal to our success. Undeterred by the cavils of the ignorant and the prejudiced, we must gather everything under our banners that is now in any way advancing the cause of Christ. Do we wish the plagues of heathenism, of unbelief, of vice and of class-selfishness to be stayed and England to be saved? it is not merely by old-fashioned service that we can do this, it is "fresh incense" which we must put into our censers, if we wish to "stand between the living and the dead."

Pardon me, my dear Lord, if the strength of my convictions has led me to any too great boldness of speech, and believe me with every feeling of the sincerest respect and attachment,

Your Lordship's very faithful Servant,

FREDERICK G. BLOMFIELD.





